



Position statement: Assisted clinical practice

Dental assistants are an essential part of the dental team and play a vital role in providing patient-centered care, delivering dental services, and maintaining a safe working environment. ADOHTA recommends that all dental practitioners work with a chair-side dental assistant for several reasons. For example, having a dental assistant in the surgery ensures that staff are working in an optimal work environment, which directly relates to maintaining infection control standards and professionally managing medical emergencies. In addition, dental assistants are required to follow stringent infection control protocols to ensure the sterilization of instruments and prevent cross-infection. Furthermore, dental practitioners are at high risk for musculoskeletal disorders due to the nature of their work. Operating without a dental assistant can promote poor prolonged postures and put additional strain on the practitioner. With a dental assistant, it is easier to follow correct ergonomics, minimizing repetitive strain injuries and musculoskeletal disorders.

The productivity of the dental practitioner is also improved with a dental assistant. Appointment times are maximized and not delayed by the dental practitioner having to set up, perform treatment, decontaminate the surgery, complete tracking records, and record clinical treatment notes. When a dental practitioner has a dental assistant performing some of these essential tasks, the time required for appointments can be drastically reduced. Education and informed consent are both imperative for comprehensive patient care. Working with a dental assistant can ensure accurate record taking and may also assist with effective communication to the patient regarding their treatment choices, making informed consent possible. Dental assistants are usually the first point of contact for a patient seeking dental treatment and can use their well-developed interpersonal skills and good verbal communication to promote oral health for patients.

In addition to these benefits, dental assistants with expanded scope who have certificates in oral health promotion and radiography can provide additional benefits to the dental practice. These dental assistants have additional training and certifications that allow them to perform more complex tasks and procedures, such as taking radiographs, providing oral health education and promotion, and assisting with oral surgery. This can further increase the productivity and efficiency of the dental practice and enhance the quality of care provided to patients. The Dental Board and the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) encourage patients to ask if their dental practitioner works with a dental assistant as it is a best practice.

ADOHTA recommends that all dental practitioners work with a chair side dental assistant for the following reasons:

SAFETY

Having a dental assistant in the dental surgery working alongside the dental practitioner ensures that staff are working in an optimal work environment. This directly relates to maintaining infection control standards and professionally managing medical emergencies. ADOHTA recommends a 'team approach' when providing the necessary requirements for the safety and wellbeing of the patient. This is also supported by the ADA. In a medical emergency like a seizure or a heart attack, the dental practitioner and the dental assistant can work effectively together to ensure the patients' needs are

met and an ambulance is called as soon as possible. Additionally, patients and dental practitioners are both protected when a third person is present. When working with children it is always recommended to have a dental assistant to ensure the safe delivery of local anesthesia and required dental treatments.

The Dental Board and the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) have published 'Tips for dental patients' to help patients and members of the public ensure they are receiving safe care from their dental practitioner. They encourage patients to ask if the dental practitioner works with a dental assistant as it is best practice to always have a dental assistant present during dental treatment.

INFECTION CONTROL

Dental assistants are required to follow stringent infection control protocols in order to maintain a safe working environment and ensure the sterility of the instruments to prevent cross infection. These protocols prevent the transmission of infectious diseases from patient to patient and to staff members, which is a safety obligation for workplaces (Work Place Safety Victoria 2016). Infection control protocols can also be followed through stringently when a sole staff member remains responsible for the mandatory decontamination of the surgery. Dental practitioners have a duty of care to their patients to provide the best quality, safe and effective dental treatments possible. It could be argued that completing treatments without a dental assistant may compromise patient care.

ERGONOMICS

Dental practitioners are at high risk for musculoskeletal disorders due to the nature of their work. Operating as a dental practitioner without a dental assistant can promote poor prolonged postures and put additional strain on the dental practitioner. With a dental assistant, it is easier to follow correct ergonomics; repetitive strain injuries and musculoskeletal disorders can be avoided or minimised.

PRODUCTIVITY

The productivity of the dental practitioner is improved with a dental assistant. Appointment times are maximized and not delayed by the dental practitioner having to set up, perform treatment, decontaminate the surgery, complete tracking records and record clinical treatment notes. When a dental practitioner has a dental assistant performing some of these essential tasks the time required for appointments can be drastically reduced.

EDUCATION AND INFORMED CONSENT

Education and informed consent are both imperative for comprehensive patient care. Informed consent is an essential part of providing patient-centred healthcare. Working with a dental assistant can ensure accurate record taking and may also assist with effective communication to the patient regarding their treatment choices, making informed consent possible. Patients may find it easier to converse with the dental assistant. With their support, patients can have a better understanding and relate better to their dental treatment and oral health.

PUBLIC RELATIONS

Dental assistants are usually the first point of contact for a patient seeking dental treatment and can use their well-developed interpersonal skills and good verbal communication to promote oral health for patients.

REFERENCES

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